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## Assessing and supporting the evolution of Grain Banks as part of food sovereignty

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### Key Words

Problem Tree, Timeline, The Wheel, Activity Dynamics, Forum, International Development, India, natural resource management, evaluation, grain banks, agriculture, Maharashtra, tribal people, aboriginal people, Participatory Action Research

### Context

- Food insecurity is a matter of grave concern amongst *Adivasi* families in the Raigad District in Maharashtra, India. It has led to malnutrition and even deaths from starvation among tribal groups.
- Between 1987 and 2005, the Academy of Development Science (ADS), a local non-governmental organization, responded to the problem by setting up more than 150 village Grain Banks in the Karjat block to ensure that paddy (rice), the main crop grown in the region, would be available.
- Based on the success of this project, the Government of Maharashtra set up Grain Banks in all *Adivasi* (tribal) areas of the state. Later, 11 other Indian states did the same, based on successful examples of Grain Bank programs by other NGOs.
- By 2005, the relevance of Grain Banks to communities in Karjat had gradually declined. ADS wanted to understand the reasons for this and to explore options to revive Grain Banks for food sovereignty amongst *Adivasi* people.
- Government Grain Banks are also beginning to fail, but are sustained by the Government due to the populist and visible nature of the programs.



## Research Questions

- What factors are contributing to the declining relevance of (paddy) Grain Banks?
- To what extent are ongoing efforts by ADS and state governments to revive Grain Banks successful?

## Participants

- More than 200 participants consisting of local governing councils (*Gavki Vikas Samiti* and *Panch Committee*), and Grain Bank members.

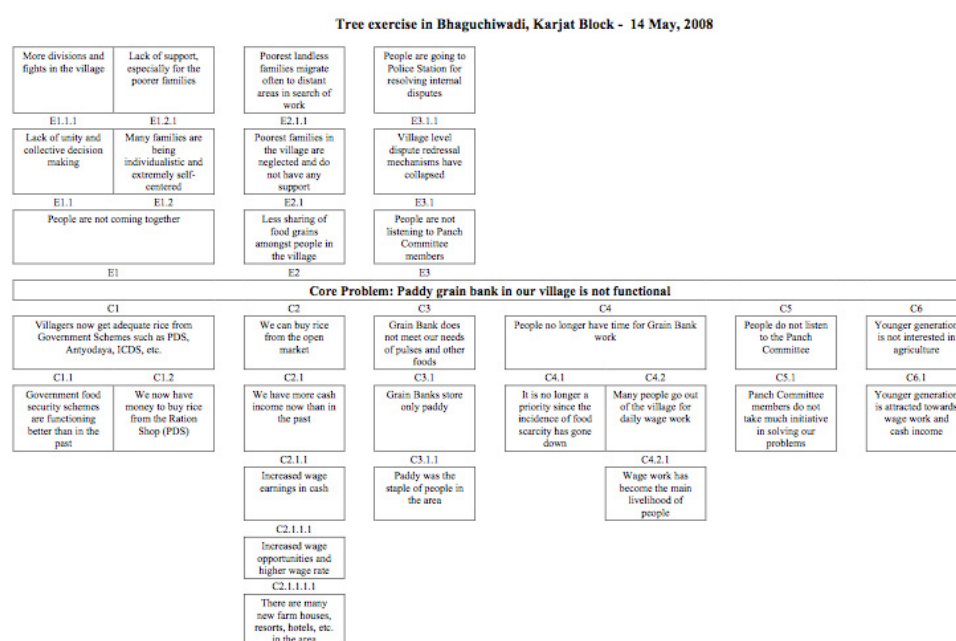
## Tools

- Problem Tree
- Timeline
- Wheel
- Activity Dynamics

Other methods: Surveys, meetings, and informal discussions in villages and with Grain Bank Committees

## Results

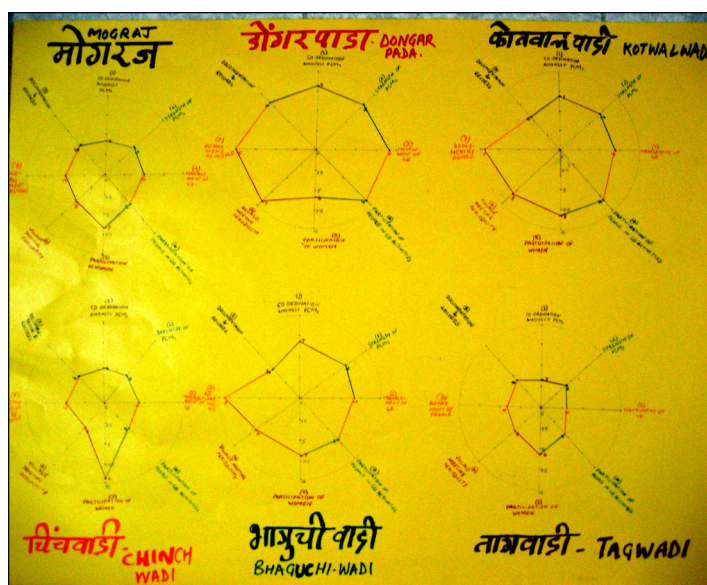
**Problem Tree** and **Timeline** brought out many reasons for the decline in relevance of Grain Banks. The most important reasons were ones that challenged the existence of Grain Banks, such as: a) We now get adequate rice from Government schemes, b) Wage work has increased so we have money to buy rice from the open market, and c) Grain Banks store only paddy but people need other foods such as pulses, cooking oil, spices, tubers, etc.



**Activity Dynamics** was used to understand the relationship between different livelihood activities followed by *Adivasi* families, and how this impacts their interest in Grain Banks. It showed a high reliance on wage work and the vulnerability that this causes for food sovereignty. Participants felt the need to diversify agricultural activities and other supplementary livelihoods.

Using criteria developed by stakeholders, **The Wheel** helped people understand weaknesses in the Grain Bank system. It showed that people support Grain Banks and repay grain loans more often where the local Panch Committees are stronger, better coordinated, and where Grain Banks are better managed. The group assessment led to actions aimed at reconstituting Panch Committees in some of the villages.

Combined, the assessments suggest that the influence of Grain Banks must go beyond food security to include many other development activities of the village.



## Outcomes

- People said that the Grain Banks were unable to meet their needs for diverse foods (millets, pulses, edible oil, etc). Consequently, ADS introduced changes in Grain Banks by introducing distribution and storage of other foods such as pulses, tubers, and millets. This may contribute to the revival of millet-based mixed cropping systems among small and marginal farming families.
- Members of village Grain Banks started participating in other village development activities such as land rights, land development, and housing. Their influence is going beyond food security.

## Contributions of SAS<sup>2</sup> to the process

- The group interactions helped people develop a better understanding of the problems facing Grain Banks than would have been possible using conventional methods such as surveys and interviews.

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- Facilitators need considerable patience and determination to keep discussions moving in the right direction.
  - Facilitations have to manage a tendency for one or two participants to provide all the scores by asking these people to allow others to also provide inputs.
  - When some people have problems relating numbers to their assessment, terms such as very low, low, lower, average, medium, ordinary, slightly more, more, high, higher, very high, can be used to generate and validate the numerical scores given by participants.
  - Research cannot be done in isolation from action programs that contribute to work in villages.

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